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ABSTRACT

Intended for junior high and high school English teachers, the articles and features in this journal focus on adolescent literature and the young adult audience. Articles in the journal discuss (1) politics as an emerging topic in young adult novels, (2) teacher attitudes and practices relevant to the use of the young adult novel in secondary school English classrooms, (3) promoting student literary response through literature for young adults, (4) author Kevin Major's experiments in young adult fiction, and (5) the role of literature in students' futures. In addition, the journal contains an essay on teaching students to write by Lee Hindel, the 18-year-old winner of the Avon/Flare young adult novel competition, and an excerpt from his winning novel. (HTH)

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The ALAN Review

Assembly on Literature for Adolescents — National Council of Teachers of English
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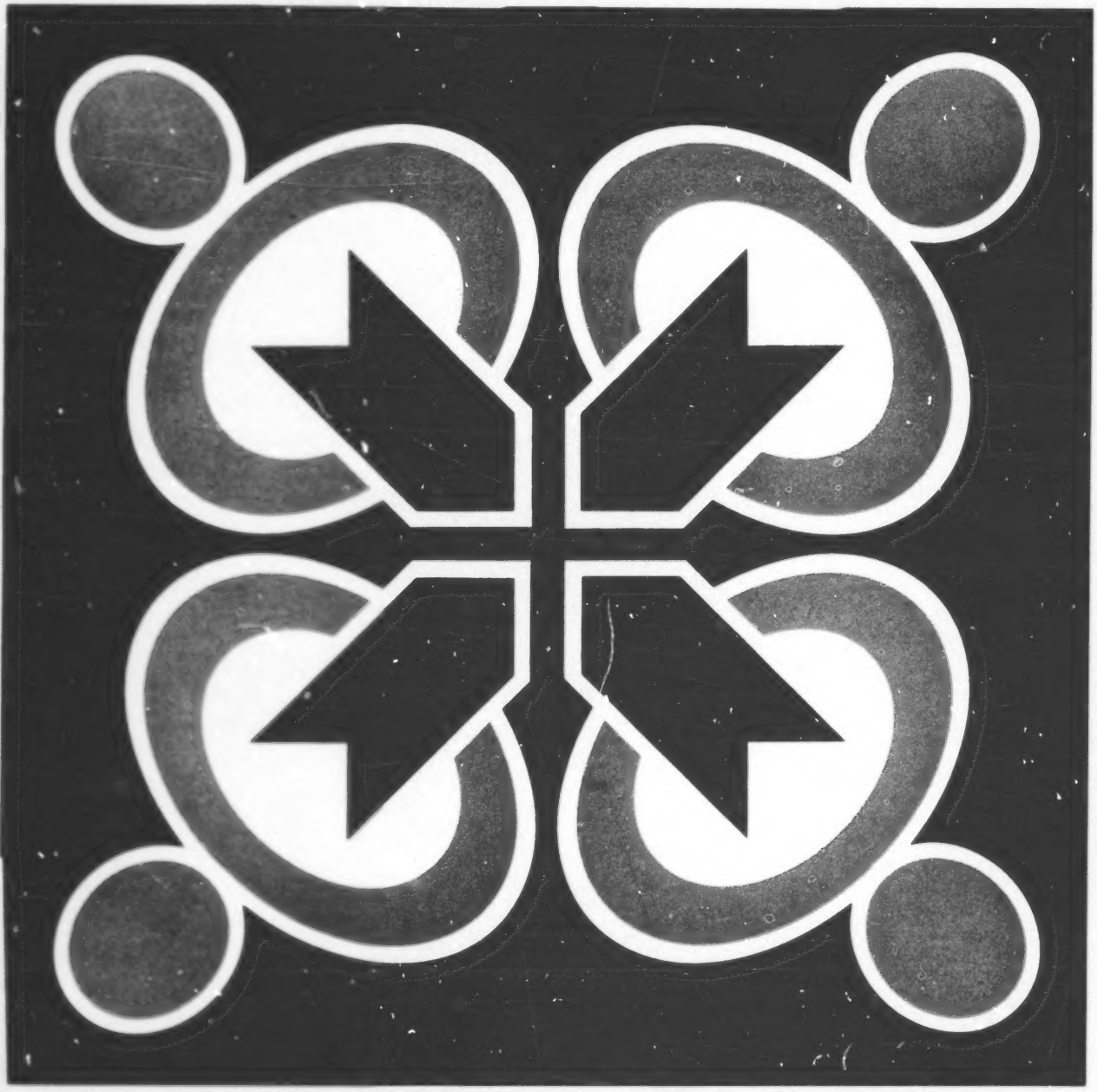

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Articles should usually be no more than eight double-spaced typed pages and should be accompanied by a self-addressed envelope to which stamps are clipped. The author's name and affiliation should not appear on the manuscript. Receipt of manuscripts will be acknowledged promptly.

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POLITICAL ANIMAL

Larry Bograd, Denver, Colorado

Some background. While many baby-boomers celebrated various rites-of-passage in the Woodstock decade, protesting against the Vietnam War, enjoying the ecstatic privileges of the counter-culture, I was a few years too young to take part. As a young teenager I watched the most acutely political decade in our recent history unfold on television, in movies, and in the periodicals. I was ten years old when John Kennedy was assasinated. The next year, 1964, politics entered my home as my parents became active in the re-election of Lyndon Johnston. At the time LBJ had done a splendid job of painting his Presidential opponent, Barry Goldwater, as a dangerous extremist who would deepen American involvement in Southeast Asia and who might even use atomic weapons in combat. I remember watching the "moderate" Nelson Rockefeller being jeered at the Republican convention, remember my parents pasting an "LBJ for the USA" bumper sticker to our station wagon's fender. Everyone was talking politics, it seemed.

Four years later, at the age of fourteen, I was affected by the assasination of King and Robert Kennedy. My parents gave me a memoir of Kennedy, published after his death, written by journalist Jack Newfield. I read this book several times, passed it on to my friends. It was my "special book", like other kids remember a novel which touched them deeply. Newfield commented that Kennedy was an admirer of the French writer Albert Camus – so Camus, especially his **Notebooks**, became my next primer. Camus presented man as an existential being, one that was forced into action in order to rightly claim an identity and fight against the abyss of non-meaning. The mix of blatant romanticism and activism touched an adolescent nerve. Certainly, growing up in the late 1960s, **inaction** seemed an impossible choice. At seventeen, for instance, I had to decide about registering with Selective Service, and wrote a long, earnest essay defending my choice of applying as a conscientious objector. In the essay, I recall, were quotes from Camus (of course), Thoreau, King, Kennedy, Einstein, and Gandhi. The same fall (1971), Nelson Rockefeller ordered the attack on Attica prison, one of the more horrific, bureaucratically arrogant gestures in my memory. It semed the establishment had turned ugly and reactionary, augmented by the Nixon Presidency. About this time I decided on a writer's career and, obviously, had grist for my creative mill.

Now–why do I write novels for young adults with a political theme? My feeling is Y.A. novels have long been pigeonholed as small, emotional stories surrounding an individual seemingly isolated from his or her world-at-large. I wanted to do something different. As a teenager I was trying to make decisions about society, integrity, commitment. I knew whatever I did as an adult would be done within a social framework–at least I hoped so. I wanted to affect events, if possible, or at least make up my own mind about them. In other words, I was conscious of the **real** world where people are often not free to choose their path, where governments or events often dictate (or preclude) action. Thus, some of my Y.A. novels use this spine: they follow the choices a young protagonist must make in

order to claim identity in a confusing, complex situation.

Secondly, some issues – human rights, atomic war – are so enormous that, as a writer, I needed a hook in order to disseminate the information I felt was important to communicate. The novel, being a flexible form, allowed me to wrap my political concerns around the basic coming-of-age theme, indigenous to Y.A. titles. At first my stories were highly topical – human rights in the Soviet Union (**The Kolokol Papers**), the effect of Reagan's attack on the so-called "safety net" of social services (**Bad Apple**), and the origins of the nuclear arms race (**Los Alamos Light**). But politics are everywhere, and often insidious. A lesson from the feminist movement is that politics affect family, school, workplace, relationships. In my most recent novel, **The Better Angel**, to be published in 1985, I tried to broaden my outlook to touch upon this idea.

If I succeed, my readers empathize with the characters in my books and, perhaps, ask themselves how they (the readers) might act in the situations presented in the narrative. Instead of dry or conflicting facts and statistics – which often deader instead of enliven the mind – I've tried to present "real-life" kids in real-life, if exotic, situations. Politics are brought to earth. Issues are presented as not being **faits accompli**, but composed of personal decisions having social ramifications.

Of course, teenagers usually feel hapless in the adult world. Kids live where their parents put them, often mimic parental attitudes and opinions. In **The Kolokol Papers**, Lev Kolokol at first struggles then accepts that his dissident parents have taken the honorable course by opposing Soviet oppression of free thought and information. Similarly, in **Los Alamos Light**, Maggie Chilton tries to understand why her scientist father is involved with the building of the first atomic bomb – but later realizes she must find a personal way to resist his analytic, dehumanized view. She does this by burying herself in the local culture of New Mexico, specifically pottery which seems like an affirmative, creative way of merging earthen elements with the human spirit. The politics in **The Better Angel** are sexual ones, and the three main characters (each of whom narrates a third of the novel) must find their way around personal, peer, parental, and community pressures and expectations. If politics are how people deal with one another, then my books are certainly political.

I hardly expect to reach as many readers as writers who are primarily entertaining or escapist in their intentions. Kids enjoy these stories – and there are certainly countless of them! They simply never interested me as either a writer or a reader. At a recent ALAN workshop I heard a romance writer quip, "If you have a message, call Western Union." My position is 180° opposite: why write if you don't have a message? There is sufficient trash for kids to read from now to doomsday, enough formulaic romance, occult, science fiction, fantasy, sports, and animal titles to wrap around the globe numerous times. On the other hand, political novels are the odd book on most publishers' list. And only Robert Cormier has emerged as a writer as popular as the Kleins, Pecks, Danzigers, et. al. Too many Y.A. novels read as scenarios for after-school specials, intimating that any crisis can be resolved with a minimum of pain and sweetened by a happy ending. The situation in Poland, Central America, and poor communities in our country certainly dispute this simplistic approach.

With political novels, teenagers may not feel so overwhelmed and uninformed – as they do according to opinion polls – when confronting issues which, in a generation, will be theirs to determine. There were many so-called "problem novels" which had serious intent – and which seem to have run their course with both publishers and readers. They certainly served an important function, as they dealt with divorce, disease, and despair. Yet because of their concentration on "problems", they tended to encourage emotional solipsism and egocentricity. Again, I feel, by dealing with political issues, the **world out there** is added to the emotional and volitional development of teenagers.

In my writing, I hope to encourage a healthy skepticism about authority, and show that life is loaded with complications which do not necessarily resolve or negate themselves. My goal is to locate a Morality in our age of moral relativism, to give hope through commitment, to counter paralysis and

resignation with the possibility of ethical action. Certainly action in itself is not the end-all.

Lev Kolokol does the "right thing" by choosing to oppose the Soviet system – yet knows he is sealing his own fate of never advancing in his homeland. (By the way, I'm a bit astonished by some reviewers' warning that **The Kolokol Papers** is Cold War propaganda – as if in worrying about President Reagan's saber-rattling we should measure our condemnation of the totalitarian tactics of the Soviet state. I despise the current administration's war-scare strategy, its 1950-ish suspicion that communists are behind all that is "evil" around the world; yet there's no reason to knee-jerkedly assume that any anti-Soviet work fuels geopolitical tension.) In **Los Alamos Light**, Maggie Chilton does what she has to do, while understanding she alone cannot stop the deployment of nuclear weapons. And Nicky, in **Bad Apple**, is a victim of a system in which he never finds his place; his actions lash out in frustration.

Still, there are moral goals: freedom over tyranny, diversity and choice over conformity, an enlightened social consciousness over narcissism and materialism. Each society sets its own agenda. We are certainly fortunate to live in one which, for all its negative aspects, gives an individual such a wide range of opportunities. My aim is no different than most activists – not to replace our system, only improve it by clamoring for more equality and less hypocrisy. In previous centuries, positive change depended on the church or monarchs' whim; today we have evolved into a political society. Thus, I try to write about this arena.

I am trying to reach thinking readers, those who may not have satisfying explanations from parents, school, church, government, and media. I am writing books that I might've enjoyed finding as a teenager. Still, my aim is that of other writers: I hope to present empathetic characters in intriguing settings and situations. I hope to touch my readers intellectually and emotionally. I hope to produce a book which will gender discussion and allegiance. At the same time, I know I won't please everyone – remember the adage "Never discuss politics or religion"? – but I don't mind. Ruffling feathers is one of the vicarious joys of being a writer. I'd rather prod a few people than merely be accomodating and harmless.

To close, I view myself as a "serious" writer, with all the attached assets and pratfalls. The world is perhaps most serious when we are teenagers, when we are not yet omnipotent, when idealism and innocence are being tested for the first time. For me to present life as simplistic and trouble-free is to lie.

I admire those artists who were activists. We in America do not have a long list but we've had our Thoreaus, Emersons, Whitmans, Sinclairs, Dreisers, Steinbecks, and Ginsbergs. We have never taken artists into our power corridors to lead public debate, such as the role Sartre played in France. Or the stature Gunther Grass has in Germany, and that Gabriel Garcia Marquez enjoys in Latin America. But artists and writers responded during the Vietnam era, as they are currently involved in countering U.S. military intervention in Central America. The traditional role of American writers (often self-assumed) has been that of the outsider – now a dangerous conceit in an age when politics dictate the very survival of our world. Politics have not been a natural source for plots in this country – except for trashy best-sellers about spies and Washington bedrooms. I argue this is a disservice to our readers and a retreat from our responsibilities as citizens.

Lionel Trilling in **The Liberal Imagination** wrote, "Our present definition of a serious book is one that holds before us an image of society to consider and condemn." I embrace this sentiment. While I choose from time to time to write light, entertaining books for young readers, I am committed to producing novels of serious intent for teenagers. If I succeed I have done my small part by transmitting a sense of moral anger to the reading public.

FUTURE Y.A. BOOKS BY LARRY BOGRAD

Bernie Entertaining, A novel for 9 - 12 year-olds, to be published by Dell, 1985.

The Better Angel, A novel for young adults, to be published by Harper and Row, 1985.

BIOGRAPHY AND Y.A. BOOKS OF LARRY BOGRAD

Judith Bugniazet, Greensboro, North Carolina

Larry Bograd was born May 5, 1953 in Denver Colorado. He received his BA in 1975 from the University of Colorado. From 1977 - 79 he was managing editor of Harvey House Publications in New York City. In 1980 he became a staff writer for the Children's Television Workshop. In 1978 Larry received the Irma Simonton Black Award from Bank Street College for **Felix In The Attic**, a children's book about loneliness.

Larry Bograd has also published under the pseudonym Grady Barrol, and has published the following books for children: **Little Book of Anagrams**, Harvey House, 1978; **Felix In The Attic**, Harvey House, 1978; **Egon**, Macmillan, 1980 and **Lost In The Store**, Macmillan, 1980. For young adults he has written **The Kolokol Papers**, Dell, 1981; **Bad Apple**, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1982 and **Los Alamos Light**, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1983.

Larry Bograd's goal in writing for children is to "provide an emotional and psychological field so the reader can 'use' the stories either as an entertaining outlet or to tap their deep-felt feelings about being a child." The themes Larry Bograd writes about are "loneliness and loss, growth and reconciliation, the search for autonomy and self, and the importance of companionship and feelings."

He says of his writing for young adults, "My work for young people centers around political themes to help them appreciate the social and global complexities of the world they will inherit. Often by allowing a reader into a fictional story, as I have done in my novels, the impersonal headlines become personal, and the characters come to life."

His books for young adults have been critically acclaimed by review sources such as **Publishers Weekly**, **The ALAN Review**, and the American Library Association's **Booklist**. In a review of **The Kolokol Papers**, Senator Gary Hart, Colorado, said "The simple courage of Lev's story should remind us all of those who struggle for human rights – in the Soviet Union and around the world."

The Kolokol Papers, Dell, 1981,
ISBN: 0-440-94552-6.

Lev Kolokol and his parents, sister and grandmother are being watched by the KGB. Lev's father and friends are human rights activists and consequently pose a threat to the State. When Lev's father is arrested, his mother goes to America to try to bargain for his freedom. When her mission fails and the Soviets refuse to admit her back into Russia, the burden is put on Lev. If the transcripts from his father's trial can be written and released in America, there may still be hope, and now it's all up to the 16-year-old Lev.

Bad Apple, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1982
ISBN: 0-374-30472-6.

Nicky is 15 and has had a hard life. Unwanted, to begin with, his parents have been harsh and shown him little love. His Uncle Eli, dances disco by the beach all day and lives in his own world. They all live in a run-down apartment. Nicky survives on junk food. His entertainment is tv, the beach and hanging-out with Prune and Lolly. Neither of them are loyal to his friendship. Nicky is angry and unable to express his anger and frustration, a volatile combination. Prune talks him into going on a "mission" that will provide them with all the money needed for their dreams. The mission gets out-of-hand.

Los Alamos Light, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1983,
ISBN: 0-374-34646-9.

Sixteen-year-old Maggie is just recovering from her mother's suicide when her father announces that they are moving to New Mexico. The only information her father can tell her is that his work is "classified", and has something to do with ending the war (World War II). The apartment they are given is constantly dusty, the school is thrown together and her friends are very different from those in Boston. Maggie is lonely and her father is too busy for her. After meeting Pobi Po, a Native American, and Gabriel, she begins to appreciate individuality and the value of life. Maggie, then, has to come to terms with the classified weapon on which her father has been working.

READERS REACT

The Search For A Doctoral Committee

As a doctoral candidate in English and Education . . . who is doing a dissertation on young adult literature and reader response, I've had first-hand experience with those traditionally negative attitudes toward adolescent literature that you describe. In fact, when I first decided to do one of my doctoral qualifying exams in young adult literature, I was hard-pressed to find anyone . . . who knew something about the genre. Outside of my program chairman there was no one in either the English or Education department who could work with me as part of an examination committee. I finally found a "YA person" in the school of library science who helped me put together a reading list, which I took back to the English and Education Program Committee for approval. Though it gave me a great deal of satisfaction to practically put the exam together on my own, I felt a bit cheated at not having access to more professional expertise.

. . . I heartily agree that those of us who know adolescents and their literature must be the ones to decide its value and its place. We must not allow others to decide for us.

Virginia Monseau
Warren, Ohio

Suggestions

May I suggest that you include a note with the column ("Y.A. Books in the Classroom") to encourage teachers to seek out their friendly neighborhood youth librarians when developing and/or updating this type of bibliography. Most young adult librarians are aware of quality material being published for junior and senior high school students. Librarians do share their information enthusiastically.

Ellin Chu
Rochester, NY

Help Requested

As an English teacher in a public high school, I want to build a cooperative program with a social studies teacher involving supplemental reading. I am looking for four novels that will serve this purpose in our American Government class for seniors. Ideally, these novels should deal with four different themes, be in the 200-300 page range and lack the specificity that attracts censorship.

Stan Smith
Minden, NE

Kudos

Congratulations on your first issue Looking good!

Bob Lipsyte
New York, NY

Absolutely super first issue. You done good. I especially liked your own column. It's good, I think, when editors with something to say and the ability to say it well, go ahead and say it. Too many editors, it seems to me, tend to hide their lights under bushels of manuscripts and don't feel they can take space in their journals. One problem, Charlie: You've created a tough act to follow. But do try.

Ted Hipple
Knoxville, TN

I just finished reading your first issue of **The ALAN Review**. It's terrific. I look forward to the new features. Once people get a look at what they get for the money, I think we'll see a real membership increase.

Dick Abrahamson
Houston, TX

Congratulations on a fine first issue! Guy has provided an excellent model, to be sure, but I know the **Review** will get even better under your guidance.

Hugh Agee
Athens, GA

Congratulations on the Spring issue. I think you are keeping the best features and adding some fine new ones. I like the "YA Books in the Classroom" column and, since I am a librarian, especially like the "Library Connections" column.

Marilyn H. Karrenbrock
Knoxville, TN

I really like the look of the Spring issue. Congratulations!

Marjorie Kaiser
Louisville, KY

Fantastic! Your maiden issue is an unqualified success. The pictures, increased leading, and graphics make a clear improvement.

W. Geiger Ellis
Athens, GA

POLITICS IN THE YOUNG ADULT NOVEL

Hugh Agee, University of Georgia,
Athens, Georgia

When I heard Larry Bograd speak of his work at the ALAN workshop during the 1983 NCTE Convention in Denver, I began to think of other novelists who have treated political issues. Immediately, I thought of Aldous Huxley (**Brave New World**) and George Orwell (**1984**). Then, too there is Harriet Beecher Stowe, whose **Uncle Tom's Cabin** is perhaps the most blatant example of novel as political instrument. When I read Bograd's **The Kolokol Papers** (1983), especially its opening sentence, "In the middle of the night, men came and took my father away in a big black car," I knew that here was a book that could reach out and grab its young adult reader. What impact would a book that reflects our concerns over the treatment of Soviet dissidents have on young readers? I wondered. Would they recognize the timeliness of the subject? Would they be moved to support the cause of human rights? Would they look for other books and articles on the subject? Would they re-evaluate their thinking on other key issues in our world?

I realize that only careful research can answer these questions, but I would like to think that books for young adults that deal with political themes will stimulate thinking and reading. Toward this end this article explores the nature of the political novel and examines the work of several young adult authors who deal with politics in their fiction.

In his study of the political novel, Joseph Blotner (1955) defines it as one "which directly describes, interprets, or analyzes political phenomena " (p. 2). Though the proletarian novel has some problem fitting his description, he deals with it by declaring that while characters may be a part of an oppressed proletariat, "they must carry out political acts or move in a political environment" (pp. 1-2). Irving Howe (1967) sees the political novel as one "in which political ideas play a dominant role or in which the political milieu is the dominant setting" (p. 19). Given the impact of **Uncle Tom's Cabin** or **Brave New World** or **1984**, we can see why Stendhal's statement in **Charterhouse of Parma** (cited by both Blotner and Howe) – "Politics in a work of literature are like a pistol - shot in the middle of a concert, something loud and vulgar and yet a thing to which it is not possible to refuse one's attention" – takes on significance.

For Howe the political novel in its "ideal" form is "a work of internal tensions" which contains "the usual representation of human behavior and feeling" while also absorbing "the hard and insoluble pellets of modern ideology" (p. 22). The challenge to an author, it would seem, is achieving the proper balance of behavior and feeling with ideology. All too often, ideology outweighs the human dimension, giving us characters who seldom come alive for the reader. This helps explain why political novels almost always include a love story, the love story brings the characters to life. In **1984** the romance between Winston Smith and Julia serves to emphasize the ultimate futility of love and passion in a totalitarian environment. In **The Kolokol Papers** the budding romance between sixteen-year-old Lev Kolokol, son of a human rights activist, and Tanya Yakir, whose parents are involved with the Kolokols, is played against the larger emotions of suffering and death that linger over all who dare oppose the Soviet system. While Orwell leaves his reader feeling that the individual cannot survive, Bograd gives his readers a different image. Lev manages to pass the microfilm of the transcript of his father's trial on to a contact who will deliver it to the West. In return, he receives photographs of Tanya who has been allowed to go to America. With these is a message of love and hope, something beyond the Orwellian view.

In **Talking in Whispers** (1983) James Watson

gives us another sixteen-year-old protagonist, Andres Larreta, trapped in an oppressive political environment. Here the setting is Chile "sometime between the present and the future." The oppressor is the Junta, and as in **The Kolokol Papers** Andres sees his father, a musician known as The Minstrel of the People, taken away by security men. Fugitive Andres gets aid from Isabel and Beto, twin performers whose van and marionette show help them in their effort to expose the evil deeds of the military. In this instance, the press is their chief ally as they are instrumental in seeing that incriminating photographs of the Junta's misdeeds are smuggled out of the country to be published abroad, just as the Kolokol papers are to alert the world to the plight of Sergei Kolokol. Affection between Isa and Andres grows in this novel, though the love theme is less a factor in the story than in **The Kolokol Papers**. In both books the political message is dominant, and Watson, like Bograd, ends on a note of hope, a characteristic of political novels aimed at a young audience.

Whether the government be left or right in its political orientation, censorship is a part of its control of the people. This is evident in **The Kolokol Papers** and in **Talking in Whispers**. In Lloyd Alexander's **Westmark**, Theo, a printer's apprentice and hero of the Westmark trilogy, has his life drastically altered by the arrival of soldiers to inspect his work and take him and his master to task for violating an order of the king's chief minister Cabbarus that requires official approval for every publication: "even a text on botany was eyed with suspicion" (p. 10). Theo becomes a fugitive and joins those opposed to the evil rule of a minister who has usurped the power of a grief-stricken king and queen. The leader of the rebels is Florian, who opposes not only Cabbarus but any form of government. Florian's anti-government stance creates a tension that carries throughout the trilogy.

In **Westmark** we see the return of the princess presumed dead and the defeat of Cabbarus. Theo receives recognition for his part in the effort, and his love for Mickle, the beggar girl-princess, opens to him the likelihood of his becoming a prince of the realm. However, the path is not an easy one. The tone of **Westmark** is more that of a romantic adventure, but in **The Kestrel** the realities of war and an anti-war message override the more tempered treatment of the first volume. In his comments on the trilogy, Alexander (1984) writes:

> Writers don't live in a vaccuum, much as we might sometimes wish to. The outside world affects the inside world. Writers' attitudes toward the human condition are bound to inform their work to one degree or another. Certainly my own books reflected my concerns and feelings: not in the sense of ideas tacked on to meet some external criterion, but simply as part and parcel of my own way of looking at things.
>
> This proved especially true of **The Kestrel**, which had begun to preoccupy me even before **Westmark** was off press. This second volume evoked fragments of my own wartime experiences and emotions; raw material to be transformed to suit the needs of the book. Also, I found myself caught up by the images of Goya's **Los Desastres de la Guerra**. These etchings, powerfully disturbing, matched my own frame of mind, for I intended to deal with the disasters of war - not only in Westmark but anywhere; not only as fantasy but as reality.

Set in Napoleonic times, the trilogy reflects the struggles of those years in which monarchs were toppled and others created. It allows for more character development than one finds in most political novels for young adults that focus on twentieth century situations. When those opposed to a beggar queen join the rulers of Regia in a war to depose her, the kingdom of Westmark is thrown into turmoil. Theo, recovered from an assassination attempt, joins Florian in the battle and shows that he, too, is capable of tyrannical behavior as the kestrel. The second volume marks a suspension of the war but not the clear resolution of the question

of type of government. Mickle – Queen Augusta – will not abdicate, and she will have Theo as her prince consort. The conflict carries over to **The Beggar Queen** wherein Cabbarus leads neighboring Regia to war against Westmark once again. The story of Theo and Mickle in Westmark is, in Alexander's words, "more than one of resistance to tyranny and the moral dilemmas involved even in fighting for a just cause. The vital centers of the story had to do with love, loyal friendships, and above all, hopefulness and possibilities." The latter are qualities of literature not always found in the political novel, or, when present, they may be handled superficially.

That literature may reflect a "selective tradition" in describing a political event is a major finding of Joel Taxel (1983) in his study of thirty-two novels dealing with the American Revolution that were written for young readers. He finds the dominant view in these novels to be "a vision of the Revolution as a struggle to secure political rights and independence from Britain. Missing from the overwhelming majority of books is any discussion of the internal question of who should rule at home that interested the Progressive and Revisionist historians" (p. 80). He also states that the narrative structure of the novels reinforces this simplistic and conservative view of the Revolution.

Taxel's concern that these novels ignore "issues relating to social, economic, and political justice" (p. 80) raises questions about the definitions of the political novel cited earlier. In short, to what extent are social and economic issues in literature also a significant dimension of the political milieu? When we consider the implication of such books as Ouida Sebestyen's **Words By Heart** and Mildred Taylor's **Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry**, the answer is likely to be "to a large extent." The political novel has a none-too-subtle message. As Alexander states,

> **Westmark** had engaged questions of the uses and abuses of power, freedom and tyranny, ends and means – not in their simplicities but in their agonizing complexities. A political book? Yes, but all art is "political" insofar as it involves human and societal relationships. Politics, in this broadest sense, is ultimately an aspect of morality, and vice versa. And a sense of morality has usually been at the heart of more durable literature.

Just how durable is the young adult novel that deals with political themes? We know that we shall have novels like **Brave New World** and **1984** with us a long time. They are unique. I dare not venture a prediction for books like **Talking in Whispers, The Kolokol Papers,** and the Westmark trilogy. However, the quality of the political novel must be judged by the same standards we apply to other novels. In addition I am inclined toward two specific questions of quality that Howe poses of the political novel: "how much of our life does it illuminate? how ample a moral vision does it suggest?" (1967, p. 25).

The political novel is, in the final analysis, anti-political by any definition of the word "political." That is to say, the presentation in literature of any political system that threatens or subverts individual liberty and basic human rights, including the right to choose a government that will uphold and defend those rights, is a statement against such a system. The treatment of political issues in the young adult novel warrants further study, and I hope this brief treatment will stimulate it.

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ANDREA AND ANGELOTTI, I'M SORRY I'M LATE

Jane Gooding Gatewood, Georgia Southwestern College, Americus, Georgia

They told me that her name was Andrea. She would be coming to the reading clinic every Tuesday and Thursday night so that I could "diagnose and correct" her reading difficulties. I confess that as a graduate student in reading education in the summer of 1983, I was more interested in the children's literature course I was taking and in finding a topic for my master's thesis than I was in strengthening reading skills. When I tested Andrea on the first day of the program, I was relieved to discover that, at age twelve, she had no real problems with reading. What concerned her parents was that she did not like to read.

Andrea and I were friends from the start. She told me, with tears welling in her eyes, of her struggle to read **Robinson Crusoe**, the novel recommended as her summer reading assignment. I remembered the summer I was twelve – finding all of the Sherlock Holmes stories on a bookcase in the back hall of an aunt's house, racing through the shelf of "teen-age books" at the library, sharing the latest volume of condensed books with my father, reading and rereading Jo's story – as though ten readings of **Little Women** and **Jo's Boys** would somehow insure that I, like Jo, would grow up to sell my stories and meet my Professor Bhaer one rainy day.

I looked at the frustration in Andrea's eyes as she talked and I knew that her memories of reading during her twelfth summer would not be like mine. In an effort to replace that frustration with the light I knew could shine there, I decided to try one of the young adult novels from the reading list in my children's literature class.

I chose Paula Danziger's **The Cat Ate My Gymsuit**. On a Tuesday night, I read the first chapter aloud and suggested that "if she had time" Andrea should read the next chapter at home. When she came in on Thursday night, she was somewhat apologetic. "I hope that it's O.K.," she said, "but I read the whole book."

As we talked about Marcy and Ms. Finney, the light was shining in Andrea's eyes.

Echoing in my mind were the words of Michael Angelotti that I had read earlier that summer:

> . . .the kind of commitment necessary to foment revolution - a commitment to adolescent literature and what it suggests about humane education, meeting students' psychological and academic needs, transition, and involvement in literature. (Angelotti, p. 11)

Looking at Andrea, I knew that I was ready to join the battle. If it were true, as Angelotti had written, that "only dedicated individuals working in classrooms, at lunch tables, in faculty lounges, and in school hallways can make a revolution", I could use my thesis as a vehicle for change. Although my expectations of making extensive changes were not high, I would strike a blow for Andrea and all the others like her.

I decided that my thesis would explore teacher attitudes and practices relevant to the use of the young adult novel in secondary English classrooms in the area served by Georgia Southwestern College. In order to know how far we had to travel, it seemed essential to find out where we were.

During the fall of 1983, I mailed questionnaires to 220 English teachers in grades seven through twelve in a fifteen-county area. Sixty-one percent of the teachers responded.

The teachers were unfamiliar with many books on a selected list of young adult novels, with only three titles, **The Outsiders, My Darling, My Hamburger,** and **Mr. and Mrs. Bo Jo Jones** read by at least half of the teachers. It was encouraging to find that 71 percent of the teachers wanted to take a course in young adult literature, and almost all (95 percent) believed that such a course would be beneficial for new teachers of English.

Like the teachers in the national survey conducted by Barbara G. Samuels, teachers who participated in my study overwhelmingly endorsed the value of young adult novels. Ninety-seven percent agreed that "young adult novels encourage a lifetime reading habit" and 90 percent agreed that young adult novels serve a role as transitional literature. Ninety-three percent believed that the novels serve emotional and cognitive needs of teenagers.

Also like the teachers in the national survey, the teachers in my study had not added the novels to their programs. This gap between professed beliefs about the genre and its actual integration into the English curriculum became evident when I compiled two lists of titles submitted by the teachers. Only two young adult novels, **The Pigman** by Paul Zindel and **A Day No Pigs Would Die** by Robert Newton Peck, were among the twenty-five novels most frequently mentioned as required reading for all students. Only nineteen, or 14 percent, of the 135 titles most often recommended by teachers for independent reading were young adult novels. Both lists were dominated by classics, with **Huckleberry Finn** ranked as number one for required and independent reading.

The revolution, it would seem, has not reached many classrooms in the area included in my survey. Teachers agreed, in theory, that the young adult novel was a valuable tool for building a love for reading, but few were using it in their courses. Angelotti's observation that the gap between literature content and the needs and interests of adolescents had narrowed little, rang true.

Sifting through the reading lists sent to me by the teachers as I packed them for storage, my disappointment was tempered with the realization that I may have made a difference. Perhaps my questionnaire did spark a conversation about the young adult novel in one of the schools or make a few English teachers examine their reading lists. Teachers who attended a workshop on our campus in June found that the young adult novel was featured on the pro-

gram. A new course, The Young Adult Novel, has been proposed. And so even if I have not fomented revolution, I may at least have triggered an insurrection.

Andrea, however, reports that "Things aren't getting much better. We're reading **Captains Courageous** now."

I'll always remember her and something of her spirit is captured in the dedication of my thesis.

To Andrea, who at age twelve, loved **The Cat Ate My Gymsuit** – because it wasn't about the "olden days - like the 1960's."

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WHAT I WOULD LIKE TO TELL TEACHERS ABOUT TEACHING THEIR STUDENTS TO WRITE
or somethin' like that

Lee J. Hindel, Avon/Flare "by teenagers for teenagers" novel competition winner, Alberta, Canada

The Land of the Bard. That was my fanciful title for the English room. Not only did my high school English teacher look a little like Bill Shakespeare, but oil painting copies of scenes from the man's tragedies were tacked to all four walls. It gave the place a very classy feel. What wasn't so classy about the place was (notice how smoothly I work in my opening anecdote into the subject at hand) was the curriculum that had to be exercised, part of which was the SHORT STORY. That horrible assignment that inevitably leads to frustration, disappointment, pain, distress, divorce, broken homes, bankruptcy, suicide, mass hysteria and chewed cuticles. Personally, I reveled in the chore. Maybe more than I knew. But enough about me. Let's talk about you. Been in town long?

Right. Here's the scenario: You, honorable educator, have just dutifully assigned the infamous lesson to them, honorable students. There. Making an educated guess, you have, oohhh about thirty pupils in your classroom. Now, upon past experience, the first ten of those thirty will actually have a healthy, eager desire to do this and they will hand in an admirable piece of prose. The second ten, by far the more practical ones, will be the group who have a myriad of better things to do with their precious time, but they know very well, if they are to pass your honorable class, they will have to hunker down and stare at it and swear at it and poke at it and doodle on it and leapfrog around it until the bloomin' thing is DONE. But that's a moot point. That leaves the last ten. Five will seek the speedy though unscrupulous course and copy with alterations some passage in a yellowing, dog-eared paperback they are confident you have not even heard of, and come off smelling like roses in the pink. The last five really couldn't give a holy hoohaw in hell if they failed or passed yer stinkin' class. Then again, this is all based on past experience.

Now, the purpose of this dissection of the typical high school English class (mine anyway) is this: You shouldn't look upon it as if it was made up of separate factions. You not only should, but can teach your class as ONE. What do I mean by that, you ask? Bull session. S'right. Siddown and shoot the said animal with your kids. Oh, my, originality abounds with this guy, you say. Y'okay, okay, let us hold one's potatoes here. I haven't said what you should yap about yet.

Movies.

Let me elucidate. I know, you've heard this all before but please allow this lad to ramble a bit.

Speaking as a teen, we are an impatient lot. We want stuff fast; we want to do stuff fast; and we want that stuff done fast. It is the age of swiftness. When it come to entertainment a lion's share of us would take the flickering screen over the printed page any day. You know it, I know it, they know it. It's a fact. So, use it to your advantage.

Right. Everybody loves movies. They love to see them; they love to think about them; they love to talk about them. Do so! Pull up a chair and babble about 'em with your class. Who saw what this summer? Last week? What's your very personal fave? Why? What made it work? What makes a movie work period? Everybody's their own experts on the matter so you'll get a carload of replies.

Go a little deeper. What are you finding yourselves jaded to in the cinema today? Examine the term "corny." Have them pick out a few celluloid turkeys they've seen. What made it the gobbler it is? What could've been done to improve it?

There. Now you've achieved a creative rapport. Everybody's in on it. You've got the imaginative juices surging. Prime time for a little rough copy.

Let them go.

I mean it. Really. Just let them run free with it. Don't itemize a string of subjects or situations for them to write about. Half of them would either hate that for it's restrictions, or love it for the instant idea they didn't have to come up with. Let their thoughts soar. And spin. And somersault.

No active thoughts forthcoming? Music. Sterling A-1 suggestion. Propose they undertake the attractive task of sitting in their room at home listening to some music. Headphones are a beautiful asset. Darkness, ecstasy. Images take wing.

Something to consider here. I'm pointing this out because this was my initial outlook. Those in your class who are avid readers will, no doubt, ape the authors they have perused. I'm not saying this is totally wrong, I mean, with my award-winning novel **Dragon Fall** I emulated Stephen King to the max! But, it's just that those pupils who show promise should not think that that writer's style is the regimen. They do not have to begin a new chapter that way; they do not have to introduce a new character that way; they do not have to put in so much useless miscellania, thinking they're giving their story body like that writer, when all they're doing is filling up space on the paper. Tell them it's okay to make it slow and ponderous; tell them it's okay to make it clean-cut and lightning-fast; tell them to make it THEIRS. And nobody else's. If you're going to tell them anything, tell them that.

Now this is important: Promise them that no one's eyes but your own will touch upon their little tale. The chances are very good that the writing will be considerably better than you had expected. The story may move beyond the more visceral to indepth emotions and thoughtlines. Perhaps, with the knowledge that their peers will not be able to take a critical gander at their little effort, fiction may meld with fact. Look at this as a one time attempt for everybody. Who knows? You just may discover a prodigy among that last five of the class of whom I spoke. Anything is possible in The Land of the Bard. How's that for a cheap romantic exit?

Biography and Book of Lee J. Hindle

Eighteen-year-old Lee Hindle was born in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. He currently lives in Alberta, Canada. Lee is the winner of the first Avon/Flare young adult novel competition. His novel **Dragon Fall** was judged the best of 550 manuscripts written by teenagers about teenagers for teenagers.

Dragon Fall, Avon/Flare, 1984,
ISBN: 0-380-88468-2.

Dragon Fall is the story of 17-year-old Gabe, who has obtained part-time work creating toys for Tally-Ho Toys. Dragons Three, his benevolent beasts, are his favorite creations until evil Mrs. Valieri, the toy company's new president, suggests he make them "aggressive, hostile and merciless." Despite his belief that, "toys are for kids. And kids have humongous imaginations, every one of 'em. So, I decided a while ago that when I made my creations I would leave the motions of them entirely up to the 'theater of their minds'," he agrees to turn his dragons into evil beasts. The stage for the fantastic metamorphose of the dragons from stuffed toys to destructive demons is set.

Editor's Note: The second annual Avon/Flare competition for teenage authors is underway. Completed manuscripts of 125 to 200 typed, double-spaced pages, will be accepted from January 1, 1985 through August 31, 1985. Authors must be between the ages of 13 and 18. A prize of $5,000

against royalties will be awarded. More information is available from: The Editors, Avon/Flare Novel Competition, Avon Books, Room 1204, 1790 Broadway, New York, NY 10019.

Dragon Fall

By Lee J. Hindle

New York: Avon, 1984

"Ernest Defarge was, as a youth in Paris, a servant of Dr. Manette. And so, having been treated with consideration, he retains a modicum of—"

Mr. Bergent paced slowly up and down the aisles in the brightly lit English room. He held a hardcover edition of A Tale of Two Cities *in front of him. He was a ruddy-complexioned man in his mid-twenties with a narrow build. He had a long, sinister black moustache that always reminded Gabe of the nefarious villian in the old* Perils of Pauline *adventures. He had been, in a way, gunning for Gabe ever since he had caught the boy with two pages full of drawings of him in a long black coat and top hat, tormenting some luscious blond with a number of inventive techniques. Gabe could have gotten away with it if he hadn't put "Mr. B" beside each and every one. The man was very touchy in that area.*

He was five aisles away from Gabe's row. By choice, Gabe sat at the last desk in the farthest corner of the room, overlooking an empty street.

Gabe was not listening to what the English teacher was saying. He had seen the 1917 and the 1935 film versions on TV and knew how the thing ended. His mind was centered on the images he had almost completed in his coil notebook. The Dragons Three.

Mr. Bergent was four aisles away now.

Gabe drew York, Sid, and Hubub together, arms around each other.

Three aisles away.

Gabe's pencil moved in small, spasmodic movements. He started to whistle through his teeth.

Two aisles.

Gabe stared down at his small acomplishment. He began to add shading.

One aisle.

Picture completed, Gabe bounced his eraser up and down on his desk top. Resting his head in his right hand, he gazed out the window. He saw the sun was enjoying its freedom. He spotted a group of sparrows that had congregated on a telephone wire. A doubling back of scenes. For no reason whatsoever, Gabe's mind jumped back to the Pumpkin-X concert, the white explosion, and—the sparrows. The sparrows that had been there. But they weren't there *anymore. They were—*

(Here—?)

Gabe sniggered stiffly and winced.

(Cut it out! That is duuummmb!)

But it wasn't so dumb. And Gabe knew it because he could feel something, almost grasp it. It was muffled, deep inside him. A slurred whispering in his mind. Messages. Questions. An agitating perception of something, bordering on deja vu. He knew it, but then again, he didn't.

Frowning, he stared again at the little birds. The group was unmoving and seemed, to Gabe, to be looking in the school building's direction. No. They were all looking in the window's direction. In Gabe's direction. At—Gabe.

"Gabriel."

Mr. Bergent's voice was akin to a searing electrical charge. Gabe jumped slightly, hoping no one noticed. His mind raced through mud. He looked up stupidly into the English teacher's face.

"Yeah?"

Giggles from somewhere in the room.

"Houston to Major Holden." A low voice, cupped in hands, from somewhere else.

Mr. Bergent looked down at the trio of dragons who stared up at them both. The English teacher worked the muscles of his jaw.

Mr. Bergent slowly ripped the drawing from the coils of Gabe's notebook. To Gabe, the painful poppings were like little explosions resounding through the room. The English teacher held the drawing up.

"Ah, Mr. Artist, what's our contribution today? Oh, how cute. You are so talented. Now how about answering the question for us." He said it all in one breath.

"The—question?"

More giggles. Red was working itself into Gabe's cheeks.

Mr. Bergent gave Gabe a dead look.

"Ernest Defarge was the leader of what underground movement?"

Gabe brought the question to the front of his mind,

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NON-FICTION: NEWS FROM ALAN AND BEYOND

ALAN

The annual meeting of ALAN will be held in conjunction with a breakfast on Saturday, November 17, at 7:30 a.m. in the Versailles Ballroom of the Ponchartrain Hotel in Detroit, Michigan, during the NCTE Annual Convention. The ALAN Award for outstanding contribution to Adolescent Literature will be made, and 1984-1985 officers will be installed. SUE ELLEN BRIDGERS, author of *Home Before Dark*, *All Together Now* and *Notes for Another Life*, will speak following the breakfast. Complimentary copies of Ms. Bridgers' books will be available.

A full breakfast is planned. Tickets for the breakfast are $11 each and can be ordered by sending a check payable to ALAN to Ted Hipple, College of Education, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN 37996. **Mail deadline is November 1.** Tickets requested after November 1 will not be mailed; they may be picked up at the door. Requests postmarked after November 8 cannot be honored, and all money mailed after that date will be refunded. **No tickets will be available for sale in Detroit.**

The ALAN slate of officers for 1984-1985:

President-Elect
Hazel K. Davis, Federal Hocking (Ohio) HS
Marilyn Kahl, West Covina (California) HS

Secretary
Alan M. McLeod, Virginia Commonwealth University
C. Anne Webb, Buerkle Junior (St. Louis) HS

Treasurer/Membership
Lelia Christenbury, Hollins College, VA
Barbara Samuels, University of Houston Clear Lake

Directors
Ruth Cline, University of Colorado
Dave Jenkinson, University of Manitoba
Marjorie Kaiser, University of Louisville
Gerry McBroom, Yavapai (Arizona) College
Carole Williams, St. Louis, MO
Jane Yarbrough, University of Wisconsin Center Marinette

Awards And Grants

Elizabeth George Speare, for *The Sign of the Beaver*, is the recipient of the first Scott O'Dell Award for Historical Fiction, which carries the largest monetary prize in children's literature ($5,000). The selection was made by the advisory committee of the *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, a journal published by the University of Chicago Press and sponsored by the Graduate Library School.

The Children's Literature Association (CHLA) with Weston Woods will offer a $500 stipend to encourage scholarly investigation into the elements and techniques that contribute to the successful adaptation of children's literature into motion pictures, filmstrips and recordings. Winners, in addition to the $500 award, may use the facilities and resources of Weston Woods to further their research. The new award joins the annual CHLA Research Scholarships which range from $250 to $1,000. These scholarships are awarded for proposals dealing with criticism or original scholarship with the expectation that the undertaking will lead to publication and make a significant contribution to the field of children's literature in the areas of scholarship and criticism. For more information contact Carol Gay, Department of English, Youngtown State University, Youngstown, OH 44555.

News From Publishers

In honor of the 25th anniversary of its Signet Classics imprint New American Library (NAL) is making a contribution to Reading Is Fundamental, Inc. (RIF), a national nonprofit organization de-

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YA BOOKS IN THE CLASSROOM

PROMOTING RESPONSE AGILITY THROUGH LITERATURE FOR YOUNG ADULTS

Jane Ann Zaharias, Cleveland State University, Cleveland, Ohio

Researchers and theorists who view reading as a transactive process maintain that both the characteristics of a reader and the properties of a text play a significant role in the determination of literary response. Moreover, a comparative analysis of the systems which have been used over the past twenty years to describe response suggests that readers' reactions to literature take four major forms:

1. Personal statement – these include emotional reactions, expressions of identification or empathy with characters or place, conjecture about characters, and autobiographical associations.

2. Description – statements which attempt to classify or describe the form, language, structure or content of a work; such responses can range in complexity from the simple recall of explicidy stated information to an analysis of the stylistic properties of a text.

3. Interpretation – responses aimed at identifying the symbolic or thematic meanings of a work; interpretation requires of readers an ability to infer the intentions of authors.

4. Evaluation – responses aimed at assessing the construction, meaningfulness, or appropriateness of a work.

Both of the aforementioned assumptions have important implications for classroom instruction. Specifically, they serve to underscore the vital role which text selection plays in determining the direction of literataure instruction and they suggest that "the teaching of literature requires an understanding of the various qualities in the literary work that produce responses in readers and the various kinds of responses they produce" (Lid & Handler, p. 153).

If, as research indicates, each literary work places its own demands upon a reader, teachers must ensure that students develop the ability to employ all of the forms of response necessary for interacting with the texts they read. As a result, teachers must make a concerted effort to include in all English courses texts which seem especially suited to evoking different types of literary response. If students are not provided with selections that elicit a wide range of reactions, their ability to respond to literature may become unbalanced. Furthermore, English instructors must encourage students to apply the four primary forms of response in varying combinations as mandated by the attributes of the literary works they read and their own purposes for reading these works; English teachers must promote response agility. This can be accomplished through the selection and use of literature for young adults.

The remainder of this article will be devoted to a discussion of four literary works, each of which demands a different type of response from its reader. These works will be examined within the context of the four major categories of response: (a) personal statement, (b) description, (c) interpretation, and (d) evaluation.

Personal Statement

Most successful contemporary authors of young adult fiction make a conscious effort to write about subjects and problems that are of interest to their readers. They work to create characters, plots, situations, and settings that appeal to adolescents. As a result, many young adult novels can be used in the classroom to foster students' emotional involvement with literature. S. E. Hinton's *Tex* might, for example, be employed for this purpose.

A character writer by her own admission, Hinton (1979a) models her protagonists after adolescents. In so doing, she encourages readers to explore their own physical, psychological and social development as it relates to the lives of the characters in her works. Her most recent novel, *Tex* is no exception.

Simple and direct in its style, the tremendous popularity of *Tex* can perhaps best be attributed to Hinton's understanding of the effects of the breakdown of the family unit on the young adult. In this novel, fifteen-year-old Tex longs for the affection of his seemingly indifferent father and the security such parental concern provides. His desperate desire to win the love of his father is further compounded by the mixed feelings he has for his over-protective brother, Mason. Like many adolescents, Tex suffers from a sense of isolation. His discovery that Pop is not his real father heightens his sense of abandonment and results in both his running away from home and a near fatal injury when he is shot by a drug addict. This tragedy causes all of the characters in the book to reassess their relationships with others, be they family members or friends. While it is apparent that Tex will never assume the role he wants to play in his stepfather's life, his resilience and adaptability help him to realize his own potential, leaving the reader with the distinct impression that Tex has moved one step further toward adulthood and is now in a better position to cope with the realities of his life.

Tex, of course, is only one of many adolescent novels which may be used to foster the most fundamental of all forms of literary response – personal statement. If, as Beach and Appleman (1984) intimate, students are not provided with works that result in personal responses, they may sense a disparity between their own private reading experiences and their classroom experiences with literature. Should this occur, it is unlikely that they will develop into lifelong readers. It is, therefore, imperative that works which facilitate a personal response be included in the literature curriculum.

Description

The sophisticated use of literary techniques in Katherine Paterson's *Jacob Have I Loved*, make this a novel which is particularly well-suited to the promotion of descriptive response. In a characteristic display of technical virtuosity, Paterson has created a novel in which each character, each episode, each speech and each image build to create a tightly woven plot that can be read on three levels. *Jacob Have I Loved* is at once,

> the story which the adolescent Sara Louise ("Wheeze") Bradshaw tells of and to herself in her attempt to comprehend the meaning of the life she is daily living; the story that the young mother and midwife Sara Louise tells through the configuration of characters and events she selects from her memory of her tumultuous teen years rounded by the insights and incidents she adds from a maturer perspective; and the Bible stories of Jacob and Esau in the Old Testament and the birth of Christ in the New, which provides an allusive frame for the other two story levels, and which add resonance to, universalize, Louise's personal experience. (Smedman, p. 181)

While comprehension of Paterson's text on the most elementary level does not necessitate knowledge of the biblical story alluded to in title, readers' appreciation of this novel can only be enhanced and enriched by such prior information. An understanding of common figurative language devices such as irony and symbolism, and the limitations imposed by first person narrative is also called for. But, the success of *Jacob Have I Loved* hinges on the ability of students to recognize how the setting, speech and customs of a particular locality function, not merely as local color, but as important conditions affecting the temperament of characters and their ways of thinking, feeling and acting.

Life on Rass Island, which serves as the setting, is

unquestionably peaceful and picturesque, it is also tedious. While the watermen of Rass toil from early morning until noon scraping male jimmy crabs and female sooks from the eelgrass in summer, dragging for them in the winter; Rass women remain at home, their major concerns being their houses, their families and the church. Ennui, as palpable on Rass as the smell of the sea, is in part responsible for Sara Louise's discontent and the jealousy she harbors for her younger twin sister, Caroline. The strict Methodist ethos which also functions as the backdrop for this story, does nothing but compound her misery.

Religion on Rass is not a casual Sunday cloak, but a mantle that sustains the islanders through the trials and tribulations of their daily existence. For Sara Louise, however, it is a curse. Haunted by God's own decree, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated" (Paterson, p. 129), Sara Louise fears an eternal life of damnation. Like the biblical Esau, she both envies and resents her twin's ability to command the attention and affection of others. Associating these feelings with the island itself, Sara Louise states, "It seemed to me that if I could only get off the island, I would be free from hate and guilt and damnation, even, perhaps, from God himself" (Paterson, p. 60). The fact she fails to recognize is that her own shortsighted selfishness and self-deceit are primarily responsible for her agony. Like Esau, however, Sara Louise is eventually able to reconcile her feelings regarding her past and her twin.

A candid memoir of one adolescent's struggle to gain her own identity and sense of self-worth, *Jacob Have I Loved* is a complex metaphorical work which places many demands on its readers. The power of this novel rests in the author's subtle artistry, as well as the readers' knowledge of prototypical social and literary conventions.

Interpretation

The success of Robert Cormier's *I Am the Cheese*, on the other hand, depends entirely upon the author's ability to control readers' interpretive responses throughout the novel. By encouraging students to articulate and explore the development of their reactions to this work, teachers can foster interpretive response.

Throughout *I Am the Cheese*, Cormier cleverly manipulates readers into believing the wrong things and ignoring the right ones. This is achieved by the presentation of one past and what appears to be two different presents. That Adam is simultaneously riding his bicycle to Vermont and undergoing his sessions with Brint is the one possibility which Cormier cannot permit readers to entertain, for knowledge that the bike trip is a fantasy is the key to the mystery posed by this novel.

Providing only incomplete information, Cormier initially leads readers to infer that Adam is the member of an ordinary family, that Brint is a therapist and Adam his patient, and that Adam is on a bike trip to visit his father who has been hospitalized in Vermont. As the story evolves and readers begin to wonder about Brint's intentions, their interpretation of the events in this novel changes.

Nevertheless, most individuals continue to believe that Adam is mentally disturbed. In fact, even after learning the truth about Adam's past, it does not occur to most students that Adam might not be, as he says he is, riding to Rutterburg on his bike. Only as Adam himself becomes aware of his delusion, do readers recognize the full horror of this tale. With their knowledge that Adam is trapped between two equally impersonal and dangerous organizations, readers find their interpretation of the story changing for a third and final time.

I Am the Cheese demands from its readers an ever changing interpretive response. It requires that they act as Adam's father was advised to act by his editor, Roscoe Campbell, for a complete understanding of this novel mandates that the reader "go beyond the superficial aspects of stories, to find the meanings below the surfaces, to root out what might be hidden or not apparent to the casual reader" (Cormier, pp. 129-130).

Evaluation

Research indicates that secondary students have difficulty evaluating literary works. Data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (1981), for example, revealed that very few American students at any age are able to explain their initial "judgments through reference either to

the text or to their own feelings and opinions" (p. 1). Although they can summarize the works they read, they lack strategies for analyzing and evaluating literature. One possible explanation posed by Beach and Appleman for this finding might be that many English instructors continue to teach primarily "classic" American and British literary works, e.g., *Huckleberry Finn, The Scarlet Letter,* and *Macbeth*; titles which both teachers and students may assume are immune from critical evaluation. To counteract this tendency, it follows that teachers need to include in their courses works which have not been the subject of intensive critical consideration.

Because adolescent literature is a relatively new genre, most established means of studying literature have not yet been applied to the works which comprise this body of literature (Mertz & England). As a result, adolescent literature provides students with a rich source of material on which to practice those skills necessary for the development of evaluative response. When selecting works for this purpose, however, teachers should not overlook the function of text in determining appropriate criteria for evaluation.

In addition to judging the internal consistency and value of literary works, students must sometimes be asked to evaluate the objective truth of the texts they read. Or, as James Britton suggests, they must develop the ability to be both a "spectator" and a "participant" when appraising works of literature. This distinction between the role of the spectator and the participant is an important one; yet, it is often neglected when English teachers select works for classroom study. In fact, the literature curriculum of most schools is replete with novels, poems, plays and short stories that invite students to assume a spectator stance. When examining these works, students are encouraged to judge the literary value and appropriateness of texts. Less apparent are reading materials which encourage participation. Since historical and nonfictional literature require students to evaluate the authenticity of events and facts contained within a work, selections which fall into these two classifications can be used to promote a participatory stance on the part of the readers. Farley Mowat's book, *Never Cry Wolf*, is a case in point.

Compressing two Arctic sojourns into one continuous first person narrative, *Never Cry Wolf* is a book in which fact, fiction and imaginative fantasy are inextricably woven into a compelling tale of adventure. When it was originally published in 1963, readers were fascinated by its humor, excitement and revelations concerning the habits of Arctic wolves. Somes biologists, however, were skeptical, alleging that much of this work was based on fiction rather than fact. In his preface to a more recent edition, Mowat (1973) responds to such criticism:

> Because it is my practice never to allow facts to interfere with truth and because I believe that humour has its vital place even within the austere purlieus of science, many experts derided the book as a work of outright fiction, denying even that it was based on two summers and a winter during which I lived in the Arctic, closely associating with wolves. It gives me some small pleasure at this late date to note that almost every facet of wolf behaviour which I described has since been confirmed by "official" science. (v-vi)

What is beyond doubt is that *Never Cry Wolf* is indeed based on two periods that the author spent in the Keewatin Barren Lands of the Canadian Northwest Territories observing and recording data concerning the role of wolves in the ecology of the North. What is also beyond doubt is that Mowat has modified and embellished the characters and events found in the book in order to serve his purpose as a storyteller. Readers are, therefore, confronted with the task of sorting fact from fiction. As a result, *Never Cry Wolf* demands that students assume both the role of spectator and participant when evaluating this nonfictional work.

Summary

The multitude of new books published each year for adolescents makes the task of selecting literature for classroom use especially difficult. Appropriateness of content, literary quality and interest appeal are the three conventional criteria which have been employed for the purpose of making such decisions. Current research, however, suggests that still another equally important criterion for the selection

of young adult literature must be that of literary response. Identification of appropriate materials for study on the basis of this criterion is not easy. It requires a comprehensive knowledge of adolescent literature, an internalization of the transactive nature of the reading process and a thorough understanding of the manner in which the attributes of texts serve to direct and limit readers' responses to literary works. Nevertheless, for English teachers and curriculum specialists who seek to develop programs that are both effective and meaningful – programs that promote interpretation, description, evaluation, and personal involvement with literature – it is the only way to select reading materials and thereby plan for instruction that will help students become more competent, sensitive and independent readers.

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Continued from page 35

dicated to creating a literate American citizenry by bringing books to children and motivating them to read. NAL plans to donate to RIF based upon total Signet Classic sales in 1984. Additionally, NAL will match the contributions of booksellers who agree to participate in this RIF campaign and make a RIF contribution based upon Signet Classics 1984 sales. An initial contribution of $25,000 was presented to RIF in May at the American Bookseller's Association Convention.

Books About Young Adult Books

In September 1984 R. R. Bowker Company will release a two volume work *Children's Fiction 1876-1984.* The reference work includes over 100,000 entries from picture books to junior high school level fiction. An author index, a title index, an illustrator index and a publishers and distributors index will assist users in locating and purchasing books. This is the most complete children's fiction reference work ever published.

Pat Scales, associate editor of **The ALAN Review,** is the author of a new monograph *Communicate Through Literature: Introducing Parents to the Books Their Teens Are Reading and Enjoying.* Published by Pacer Books of The Putnam Publishing Group, this very useful little book thoroughly describes the Greenville, SC, Middle School "Communicate Through Literature" program in which parents of teenagers meet together on a regular basis to discuss the books their children are reading. The monograph is available from Marketing Department, Pacer Books, The Putnam Publishing Group, Books for Young Readers Division, 51 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10010 for $2.00. A 40% discount is offered on orders of 20 or more copies.

BE THERE
THE 1984 ALAN WORKSHOP

Detroit, Michigan - November 19-20, 1984

LITERATURE FOR ADOLESCENTS: THE CLASSROOM CONNECTION

The publishers are being generous, our colleagues are unselfishly giving of their time, the facilities look great. All of the signs point to an extraordinary ALAN workshop. Plan now to make it. Bring a friend, a principal even. In hopes of motivating all ALAN members to come together in '84 to celebrate our conference, I am providing a tentative final report of workshop features so far confirmed. Call me at our ALAN workshop hotline number (806) 742-2338. I will be happy to update you on ALAN activities in Detroit.

Michael L. Angelotti
Texas Tech University
ALAN President and Workshop Chair

LISTEN TO, MEET, TALK WITH YOUNG ADULT AUTHORS

Sandy Asher, Dell Publishing Company, Inc., New York, N.Y.
Sue Ellen Bridgers, Bantam Books, New York, N.Y.
Eve Bunting, Pocketbooks, New York, N.Y.
Allen Eckert, Little Brown & Company, Boston, Mass.
Charles Ferry, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, Mass.
Gwen Hamlin, New American Library, Inc., New York N.Y.
Isabelle Holland, Little, Brown & Company, Boston, Mass.
Monica Hughes, Bantam Books, New York, N.Y.
Kevin Major, Dell Publishing Company, Inc., New York, N.Y.
Norma Fox Mazer, Four Winds Press (Scholastic, Inc.), New York, N.Y.
Margaret Willey, Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., New York, N.Y.

DISCOVER CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS FROM SPEAKERS AND PANELISTS

Dwight Burton, Ken Donelson, Alleen Nilsen, Bob Probst, Bob Small with Ted Hipple as moderator; "Author's Forum: If you want to know, ask the people who write the books about YA Lit"
Elizabeth Belden, University of Iowa, Iowa City, "Current Reading Interests of Young Adults from the YA Point-of-view"
Dwight Burton, Florida State University, Tallahassee, "Beyond the Problem Novel: What About Poetry in the YA Classroom?"
W. Geiger Ellis, University of Georgia, Athens, "Classics Yes"
Louise Pense, Librarian, Worthingway Middle School, Worthington, Ohio, "Building Bridges: the Library and the Classroom"
Elizabeth Ann Poe, Arvada West High School, Arvada, Colorado, "Reading Ladders: A Companion Novel Approach to *A Separate Peace*"
Arthea "Charlie" Reed, University of North Carolina, Asheville, "Reaching Adolescents: Teaching YA Books in the Classroom"
Robert C. Small, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, "The Young Adult Novel: Is It Real Literature?"
M. Jerry Weiss, Jersey City State College, N.J., "Some New and Not So Old Young Adult Novels"
Linda Seramur, SUNY, Pottsdam; Laura Geringer, Harper & Row, New York

WORKSHOP CONSULTANTS

Associate Chair: Richard Abrahamson, University of Houston, Houston

Dwight Burton, Florida State University, Tallahassee
Linda Seramur, SUNY, Pottsdam
Leila Christenbury, Hollins College, Virginia
W. Geiger Ellis, University of Georgia, Athens
Al Muller, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina
Geraldine LaRoque, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls
Arthea "Charlie" Reed, University of North Carolina, Asheville
Robert C. Small, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg

ALAN WORKSHOP PREVIEW

WHO SAYS YA BOOKS ARE ALL THE SAME?

A Look At Kevin Major's Experiments In YA Fiction

Mike Angelotti, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas

> Good writing starts, I believe, with a freshness of vision, be it in the approach to the story, the insights into the characters, the use of language, whatever. There must be believability; it must come alive to the reader. And, I think, it should be upsetting as well as joyful. That is, human . . . But any writer must see beyond his immediate environment and present characters and stories, which, although true to the small bit of the earth he writes about, have relevance to the general human condition and can speak to readers no matter where they live. (1983)

Commenting on his writing philosophy after the publication of his first two novels, Kevin Major makes about as good an analysis of his work to date as might any literary critic. His thinking, as I read it, is that writing adapts to story and reader. It follows that conventions are adhered to as they suit the telling, and where they do not, new rules are invented. A brief review of his three novels reveals not only application of this notion, but also quality work, steady development, experimentation, and movement away from formula YA fiction.

A Newfoundland native, Major has set all three of his novels there, with particular focus on the fishing village of Marten. *Holdfast*, his first published novel, is as much a story of Newfoundland as of Michael, the older of two brothers who must cope with the sudden death of both parents and the threatening future ahead. Michael refuses to yield the old ways of the fishing village to what are to him unnatural laws of the city and his overbearing uncle.

He finally runs away – back to Marten. Two themes that emerge in this book seem also to control the main characters in following works: the need of each human spirit to shape itself and the need to preserve the past in order to make sense of the present and the future. Michael "gave the story its strong narrative drive. What the one-person viewpoint didn't allow me to do was develop some of the other characters as well as I would have liked." (1983) *Far From Shore* departs from the limited viewpoint of *Holdfast* to a more risky multiple first-person viewpoint.

> I sacrificed the drive of narration for more fully realized characters. The story is sometimes jumpy because I constantly switched narrators. But because I was telling the

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LIBRARY CONNECTIONS

edited by Patsy R. Scales, Greenville Middle School, Greenville, South Carolina

LEADING STUDENTS OF LITERATURE WHERE IT MATTERS: TOWARD THE FUTURE

Albert B. Somers, Furman University, Greenville, South Carolina

Although it appeared in the papers in early August when most of us were busy squeezing the last ounce of pleasure out of summer (some of us by reading), I'm sure the majority of English teachers and librarians took due note of the latest list of works all high school students should read before they graduate. In my newspaper, the headline read, "Shakespeare heads list of literary suggestions."

We've seen these kinds of things before, often from universities, but occasionally from panels and commissions that clear their throats before proclaiming. Here the whole thing seemed a little more relaxed. William J. Bennett, chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the columnist George Will had informally surveyed 157 scholars, journalists, and cultural leaders. The rest of the votes came from 168 high school teachers attending summer humanities seminars. It was all about as scientific as a seance, and the results were equally ethereal: besides Shakespeare, there was the Bible, *The Declaration of Independence*, Plato's *Republic*, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *Great Expectations* and *Moby Dick* – among many others. The only surprise may have been the smattering of recent works – Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, Orwell's *1984*, and the poetry of Robert Frost.

Challenging the validity of a list like this is like questioning the Ten Commandments or the Boy Scout Pledge. But seriously: is a person's education incomplete if he has not read all these works? I don't think so. (Even Dr. Bennett admitted that some of the thirty titles on the list had eluded him.) And what do they mean by "read"? Do they mean to become passingly familiar – reading as a trivial pursuit? Do they mean to study? Do they mean to respond to at length and in a variety of ways? What about the student who can't even make literal sense out of *Great Expectations*? What about the teacher who despises *Great Expectations*? Who are these people to tell us what we ought to be teaching? As you can see, lists often leave a lot of unanswered questions.

I agree that we should ask our students to read a lot and that we should be concerned with quality. But what matters most is not what students should be required to read before they graduate but what they will choose to read afterwards. For decades, by force-feeding them *Great Expectations*, *The Scarlet Letter* and *Wuthering Heights* before they were ready, by relentlessly prescribing this castor oil approach to the teaching of literature, we have ensured that all that most of our students will read as adults is Harlequin Romances and Harold Robbins.

We English teachers have failed rather miserably at the business of promoting literature as a lifelong pursuit. Think back for a minute to a typical English

class you taught ten or twenty years ago. Remember names and faces. How many of those students are today reading literature by choice? How many of them know of Alice Walker or Ann Beattie or William Stafford? How many attend serious theater? How many browse through the poetry section of a bookstore? How many of them return to read again the clasics they survived in high school? The answer to each of these questions is painfully obvious: very, very few.

The solution to the problem, however, is not what Dr. Bennett's survey would imply. The solution is not Plato's *Republic* in the ninth grade or *Hamlet* in the twelfth, at least not for most students. The solution is a program involving teachers and librarians in (1) the careful selection of works of quality and interest throughout the grades, with particular attention given to student readiness, and (2) the equally careful emphasis on the emotional and intellectual response of students to the works.

In choosing works to teach, English teachers need to stop looking first and foremost for the finest classics. Instead they need to find good novels and plays, regardless of when they were written or by whom, that students can read and respond to with genuine enthusiasm. They need to select works that will interest and excite students, that will make them want to read another book by the same author or on the same subject, that will encourage them along the way toward becoming permanent readers of literature.

For many adolescents in grades seven through ten especially, these works should include some of the better young adult novels written in recent years, books like *Sounder, Julie of the Wolves, Summer of My German Soldier, Jacob Have I Loved* and *I Am the Cheese*. With the active help of librarians, teachers need to become more familiar with these books and realize their usefulness in conveying the same concepts we've tried to teach with classics – plot, characterization, point of view, symbolism, irony, and so on. *Jacob Have I Loved* by Katherine Paterson, for example, offers wonderful opportunities to examine and discuss characterization, allusion, and symbolism; *The Chocolate War* by Robert Cormier, similar potential for teaching theme, irony and setting.

Teachers and librarians need to discuss these young adult books with each other. They need to develop criteria for distinguishing those that are worthy of selection as class novels from those that might be recommended only for outside reading. They especially need to become more assertive in promoting them – in book fairs and school bookstores (both of which can help alleviate the problems of access) and through telephone interviews of the authors. Teachers need to ask librarians more often for suggestions: "What's a good young adult novel to use in a unit on war?" (One possibility: *My Brother Sam Is Dead* by the Colliers.) In response, librarians can recommend sources of reviews (like *School Library Journal, Horn Book* and *The ALAN Review*) and even suggest the use of recently developed computer software, like Scholastic's *Bookstore*, to help teachers and students find just the book they're looking for.

Excited and encouraged by their experience with these young adult novels but hungry for books with adult concerns and themes, many adolescents will move readily through this phase and into the longer, more demanding modern classics – *Lord of the Flies, To Kill A Mockingbird, A Separate Peace, The Catcher in the Rye* and *Cry, The Beloved Country*, to name just a few. Many of them may never leave this stage; the literature they choose to read as adults will be consistently modern, books like Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and Bernard Malamud's *The Natural*. But the difference between these readers, who have been nudged and nurtured along toward the reading of good and better books, and our graduates of the past will be distinctive: they will be reading literature.

English teachers may need less help in selecting these modern works, but librarians can work wonders in warding off the potential censors that often lurk in the shadows. By organizing parent support groups for the literature program, developing justifications for books and becoming aware of procedures for responding to complaints, teachers and librarians can cooperate to ensure that selection is not compromised by censorship.

To increase the access of weaker readers to some of the modern works, teachers and librarians should consider taking greater advantage of the growing

popularity of recorded books. They might record appropriate programs from the Radio Reader or order titles from companies like Books on Tape.

From these modern classics, whatever the source, some of our students – those who are skillful readers, who come from backgrounds where reading is valued – will of course progress to the classics, a few as early as the eighth or ninth grade, most of them later. They will be ready for intricate plots, textured characterizations and bottomless meanings. These students should be challenged by the best – surely *Great Expectations, The Scarlet Letter* and *Macbeth* and all the other works on Dr. Bennett's list – and perhaps *King Lear*, Dostoevsky and Joyce.

Here teachers and librarians can work together as well, making sure that the students and classics connect. If I've assigned *Wuthering Heights*, my students would profit from a library display on related books – about the Yorkshire moors or the eccentric Bronte family. The librarian might suggest audio visual aids, such as *The Brontes: Fantasy and Reality* from Guidance Associates. More generally, librarians might recommend Steve Allen's useful and amusing little article "How to Read the Classics," which is free in large numbers from International Paper Company.

If wise and appropriate selection is the first key to developing future readers of literature, response is surely the second. In the past, two discouraging approaches to the teaching of novels and plays have often held sway – (1) the recall approach, where students "discuss" the work by answering factual questions about characters and events ("Who was the Widow Douglas's sister?"), and (2) the study approach, where they listen to lengthy lectures on the plot, structure, and meaning of the work, with Cliff Notes ever at the ready.

Both of these methods, of course, have their place in the literature program: the reader must know "the facts" before she/he can address the broader, more important questions and issues in a work; and only by studying and often listening to the teacher explain a work can the reader fully appreciate it and others like it. The problem is that we often stop there. We fail to get beyond the facts or to give the student an opportunity to apply what we have taught, to practice the reading of literature, to test understanding of character and theme.

As we teach literature, we must give students a chance to respond – to reflect, to talk, to write, to improvise, to construct, to create, to argue, to resolve. We must ask questions that have no easy answers ("In his actions on behalf of Mary Jane Wilks, is Huckleberry Finn dishonest? Is he immoral?"). We need to give assignments that stretch the intellect and the imagination at the same time, assignments of interest and value. Some of these should provide the student with a rhetorical perspective and challenge his/her understanding of character development, as the following does with *The Red Badge of Courage*: You are Henry Fleming. Write three letters to your mother – one written at the end of chapter 1, another after you have rejoined your regiment, and a final one at the end of the novel. Communicate fully to her your impressions and concerns.

Other assignments should turn the reader inward to reflect upon him/herself and upon the value that literature offers, such as the following activity for *A Separate Peace*: Like Gene Forrester, all of us are guilty at one time or another of wasted opportunities, of failing to perceive and value experiences that are available to us. Write about a time in your life when you failed to take advantage of a situation from which you might have learned and benefited.

Teachers can create assignments like these. With the help of librarians, English departments can develop files of response guides to novels and plays with discussion questions and activities that can be used year after year to enrich and extend the experiences of students with literature. They can recommend for purchase any number of helpful books and teaching guides from companies such as Sundance, Learning Links, and Perfection Form. Together, teachers and librarians might even preview some of the better computer software now being developed for reading enrichment, like the programs produced by Media Basics Courseware.

Whether through software or class discussions, then, students must be allowed to respond; and whether by young adult novels or the classics, they must be guided carefully toward the goal that all of us have reached and want to share: the lifetime

reading of good books.

My daughter is one of these students. At fifteen, she struggles with math but reads with skill, and with an enthusiasm that has drifted only slightly during adolescence. Four years ago she cut a swath through all of Judy Blume and most of Paul Zindel, like a whirlwind through wheat. Last year in the ninth grade, she was inspired by *A Separate Peace* and *Of Mice and Men*, but sapped by *Silas Marner*, the classic literary dinosaur that English teachers often insist on digging up. This summer she read *Main Street*, which she didn't like, and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, which she loved.

In recent years she has made the important transition from the fluff of Nancy Drew to the beauty and strength of *Huckleberry Finn*, and now she seems poised on the brink of becoming a person who will forever enrich her life through reading. But she is not there yet. As a tenth grader, she is ready for Stephen Crane and Walt Whitman, but not for Jane Austen and William Cullen Bryant. Not quite.

And so my concluding appeal to teachers and librarians is this: please be careful with her and all the other students, with the literature you choose to teach and how you teach it. As all of you are well aware, there is a lot at stake. ☺

Continued from page 43

> story of a family much more than I was in the first novel, I wanted the reader to see just how each member viewed the other and how they responded to the changes that the family was undergoing. (1983)

One of Major's strengths in these works is his ability to create believable characters who speak and think as Newfoundland youth might, but at the same time, beneath dialect and local custom, as any youth might.

In his third novel, *Thirty-Six Exposures*, the characters are as authentic, but they are older, more sophisticated and virtually free of the distinct Newfoundland dialect of the first two books. It is not so much a story of Newfoundland as it is of the passage of adolescence. Lorne's preoccupations with photography and poetry reveal to him the heart of his native land and an unexpected image of himself. The title, thus, is ironically linked to form and content as the 36 chapters unmask the past, interpret the present and project the future for Lorne.

> (It) uses a third person viewpoint and is structurally different again. It has allowed me to move more freely in time and space and has given the detachment I was seeking, as well, of course, as more varied use of language. I am fearful of losing the direct contact with the reader that the other two books had, yet I am enjoying the versatility that the third-person brings.

Whatever his anxieties might have been, the novel works. Major is fearless in his gambles, which, thus far, have proved to be sure bets. The ultimate payoff, of course, has been to his readers.

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WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Special to THE ALAN REVIEW from NCTE:

Darwin Turner, director of the NCTE Commission on Literature, said that his panel is concerned about students' dwindling opportunities to read significant literature in school. This de-emphasis stems from a number of factors, the University of Iowa professor said. "Our commission members from the high schools say that films, adolescent literature, and very popular current titles are being substituted for older (and newer) works by authors with artistic concerns—works that require closer reading."

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which was a useless act since he didn't have the foggiest idea what the answer was.

"Gabriel."

"Yes?"

"The answer?"

"Uh, I dunno."

"You dunno."

"No."

"I was sure yesterday I assigned the chapter that has something to do with the answer to the question."

"I guess I didn't read it."

"You guess?"

"I didn't read it."

"So there is no guessing about it."

"I guess not."

The giggling was unending.

"Getting back to the question at hand. Would I be correct in saying that you do not know the answer to it?"

"Uh, you would and I don't."

"You don't have the barest inkling as to what the answer is?"

"That's about it."

The giggling stopped. The silence in the room was stifling. Gabe sat rock still and stared at his pencil.

(Go away, Bergent. Oh, please go away. I've had enough, really. I'll be good. Go away and torment some other poor soul.)

Bergent didn't go away. He just stood there, forearms on Gabe's desk, staring at him for a million and one years. Then he turned to the rest of the room.

"Well, what do you think, people? A little stupid?"

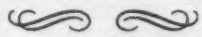
A couple of kids said, "Yeah."

"Apply a little logic next time, Gabriel," the English teacher said, and in one movement he crumpled the dragons in his large pink hand, scooped up his textbook, turned on his heel, and strode up the aisle.

Exhaling a stream of air, Gabe looked back outside at the sparrows.

The telephone line was empty.

Naturally.



Abridged from Lee J. Hindle's Dragon Fall (New York: Avon, 1984), pp. 73-77. Copyright © 1984 by Lee J. Hindle. Reprinted by permission of Avon Books.

THE BACK DOOR

Relax, recover and recharge is the prescription for my summer vacation. But, somehow, there is always something that gets in the way of my plans. Such an event occured on our return trip from a week of sun and relaxation. As is our custom, we were listening to National Public Radio's "All Things Considered" while driving along a South Carolina interstate when the announcer, without meaning to, interrupted my summer.

"How could they do that?" I shrieked at Don who nearly ran off the road. "Do what?" "Weren't you listening? The Columbia, SC, Board of Education has banned Robert Cormier's *The Chocolate War* from use in the high school classrooms. They say it has bad language and portrays a critical image of schools. That's just not true! Not only that, but the reporter didn't even use Cormier's name, only the title of the book – like it sprang forth without an author from the place in which all 'evil' books are conceived." "Calm down, Charlie!"

Censorship takes many forms. The obvious, outright censorship of the Columbia, SC, Board of Education (though, I believe the announcer quoted the Board Chair as saying, "We have a right to select the material used in our classrooms – this is not censorship – it is selection."), the censorship of the parent who refuses to allow her child to read an assigned book, the censorship of the librarian who removes a 'questionable' book from the library shelf because someone in the English Department said it is not good literature, the censorship of publishers who expurgate original manuscripts to make them more 'acceptable' to their readers, the censorship of editors who change authors' words because the book might not sell as well, the censorship of authors who allow this to happen, the censorship of teachers who do not allow their students to read romances to fulfill classsroom assignments or who do not assign books for fear of retribution, the censorship of interest groups who rid books of sexist or racist language. Most of us have been censors. Often for what appears to be good reason. Always out of fear. We want to protect our children from ideas we reject; we want our books to sell; we want to avoid conflict; we want to keep our jobs; we want the world to be better than it is; we abhor sexism and racism.

I understand these fears – I share them. I have worked in communities in which I felt the need to be circumspect about books I brought into my classroom. I want people to keep reading *The ALAN Review*; I don't want to offend my readers. I know how impressionable young people are; I don't want them to be adversely influenced by ideas I believe to be immoral or unethical. But, I fear censorship more!

I want to have the right to read all kinds of

material. I want to have access to the thoughts of all men and all women. I want to have the opportunity to discuss these materials and the ideas contained within them with other thinking people. I want the same for young readers.

If we censor, nothing is safe – *Huck Finn, The Grapes of Wrath, Forever, The Chocolate War, Where the Wild Things Are, The Cay, The Bible.* Nothing is safe, if I allow myself to succumb to my fears.

Pat Scales reported in the Spring 1984 "Library Connections" column on a project that has helped remove the threat of censorship from her library. Likewise, I found that allowing for freedom of choice among students and keeping parents appraised of the range of choices allowed me to use a wide variety of books in my own classroom. Both of these answers to the censorship question involve open communication – underscoring the maxim that understanding reduces fear – thus, reducing the threat of censorship.

NCTE has spent several years writing a position paper which attempts to describe for teachers the difference between censorship and selection. (By the way, that position paper does not consider the act of the Columbia Board of Education to be selection.) The paper agrees with the eloquent description of selection written by Lester Asheim in 1953.

> Selection . . begins with a presumption in favor of liberty of thought, censorship, with a presumption in favor of thought control. Selection's approach to the book is positive, seeing its value in the book as a book and in the book as a whole. Censorship's approach is negative, seeking for vulnerable characteristics wherever they can be found – anywhere within the book, or even outside it. Selection seeks to protect the right of the reader to read; censorship seeks to protect – not the right – but the reader himself from the fancied effects of his reading. The selector has faith in the intelligence of the reader, the censor has faith only in his own.(Wilson Library Quarterly)

In addition, NCTE has given guidance to schools in developing their own selection policies. Both NCTE and the American Library Asociation make available to their members information on censorship and how to avoid it, including sample forms to use if a complaint about classroom or library material is received. All of these are positive responses to the often emotional issue of censorship.

I would like to hear from readers of *The ALAN Review* about your positive rsponses to censorship. I'd like to know what you have done before censorship has become an issue, in the midst of a censorship battle, after the issue has been resolved. Your experiences will help all of us deal with our fears. And, perhaps, I now can continue my summer vacation.

Charlie Reed

SHOULD THERE BE A COMMON LITERARY HERITAGE?

According to a survey of 325 "scholars", journalists, teachers and government and cultural leaders sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities, there are certain works that every student in the country "might reasonably be expected to have studied before he or she graduates from high school."

The list is topped with the works of Shakespeare, Huckleberry Finn (Clemons), the Declaration of Independence, and the Bible. The list includes authors such as Homer, Dickens, Plato, Steinbeck, Sophocles, Melville, Thoreau, Frost, Whitman, Fitzgerald, Chaucer, Marx, Aristotle, Dickinson, Dostoevski, Faulkner, Salinger, de Tocqueville, Austin, Emerson, Machiavelli, Milton, Tolstoy and Vergil.

It is interesting to note that the most recent work included on the list is J. D. Salinger's Catcher in the Rye, the only female writer on the list is Jane Austin, and there are no minority writers included. I can't help but wonder what kind of a world view this "common literary heritage" gives our students.

The questions I pose to readers are: Should our students have a common literary heritage? If so, is this the heritage we want them to have? I would like to devote some space in the "Readers React" column to your responses to the reported survey and the posed questions.

Charlie Reed

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